



REFRESH YOUR FAITH

WITNESS OF FAITH IN THE HOME

Celebrating the **New**
Directory for Catechesis



CONNIE CLARK



Refresh Your Faith: Casual Catechesis at Home

So you're doing faith formation at home this year. Maybe it's a temporary solution while formal religious education at your parish or school is suspended. Or maybe you're considering a home-based approach indefinitely. No matter where you are with this, you might be wondering where to begin. This resource can give you some guidance, encouragement, and practical ideas for how to make this work for your family.

Whether you're following a school or parish program or going it on your own, there are just a few things you need to remember. The first is that you are the best, most qualified person to pass on the faith to your child. You might disagree with that. Maybe you don't feel very close to God these days. Maybe you're a little fuzzy on what you learned in Catholic school or faith formation classes. Maybe you even question some of the Church's teachings. But it's your own personal, unconditional love that qualifies you. "The love of parents is the means by which God our Father shows his own love," says Pope Francis.

Every time you stayed up all night with your sick child, sacri-

ficed something you wanted for your family's sake, listened to your child's concerns, hugged your child in forgiveness, or simply looked up at the night sky in wonder with your child, you were showing them what God's love is.

Those are some pretty amazing religion classes you've led.

Now I know it's going to be challenging this year, especially if you're already juggling school distance learning, your job (or a job search), childcare, and all the stresses of the world right now. That's why the second thing to remember is that you are not alone. You have the support of your parish and/or Catholic school behind you. In fact, you also have the whole Church on your side. You are supported and lifted up in prayer by people around the world who are praying for you.

One of the most important documents you'll never read

Another way the Church supports you can be found in a new papal document that lays out how we share and teach the Catholic faith in the twenty-first century. It's called the *Directory for Catechesis*, or the DC for short. This pontifical document is heavy on theory and theology, but it gives direction and guidance for how the whole Church passes on the faith. That might not seem very earth shattering, but considering that this is only the third such document published since 1971, and that we have it *now*, when so many families are taking on the faith formation of their children, I'd say that's more than a coincidence. That's God showing us he's got our backs. Remember what Jesus promised? "I am with you always, until the end of the age" (Matthew 28:20).

The DC does several important things for you. First, it calls on the whole Church to support you in passing on the faith.

The Church is called to cooperate with parents through suitable pastoral initiatives, assisting them in the fulfillment of their educational mission to become above all the first catechists of their own children. (*Directory of Catechesis*, 124)

For the people at your local parish or Catholic school, this is like getting a note from mom in their lunchboxes reminding them to play with everyone at recess, because after all, they are the leaders, and it's up to them to set the tone for the whole class. So throughout the world right now, religious education leaders, Catholic teachers, and catechists are putting their heads together to follow the directives of the DC to help families like yours. And that's good for all of us.

In Your Corner

This new document also supports the unique role families have in passing on the faith. Even better, it greatly relieves some of the pressure parents can feel about this. You may have heard from Catholic teachers and parish folks (and yes, even the pope himself) that parents are the first catechists for our children. That's true, but the Church makes it clear in the DC that you don't have to teach courses in theology to your kids, or keep a closet full of Sunday school crafts in your home. You are already teaching the gospel by your very life. The kind of religious education that happens in our homes doesn't happen at tidy little desks or in long lectures.

It is, indeed, a Christian education more witnessed to than taught, more occasional than systematic, more on-going and daily than structured into periods. (DC, 227)

In other words, if you've got a full schedule already, don't agonize about adding religious instruction on top of it. Do things at your own pace. Be aware of the Holy Spirit's guidance and direction in your

life. The DC even gives this kind of everyday faith formation sort of a hip new name (for a pontifical council anyway): *casual catechesis*. You might hear this a lot in religious education circles over the next few years. Casual catechesis means that all of the things you're already doing to help your kids grow into responsible, good, kind adults who follow Christ's teachings are exactly what you should be doing.

Encouragement should be given to...catechesis in different places: the home, the office, educational, cultural, and recreational environments... These places, which are often more loosely focused than those of the Christian community, are suitable for casual catechesis because they create more familiar relationships, and in this more visible connection with everyday life catechesis can turn out to be more compelling. (DC, 223)

Roughly translated into plainer English, this means that when it comes to faith, you get to do the fun stuff. The real, living stuff. You can snuggle up with your kids on a winter night and read the *Chronicles of Narnia* to them. You can create family traditions of going to Sunday Mass and getting doughnuts or breakfast afterward. You can have a picnic on the floor and say grace together. You can show your kids what it means to share the love of Christ by taking them on a window visit with grandma or by collecting PPE for your local hospital. Your job isn't managing or teaching. Your job is witnessing; that's loving God and others together, in an intentional way—by the way you live your life.

“This is all very nice, but I'd really like some help with the textbook.”

Of course, you are probably looking for a little bit of formal guidance. Again, the pretty awesome DC can give you that. It offers four

simple, time-tested, Catechism-backed guidelines for families to follow casual catechesis (or more formal catechesis, if that's your thing). This is what the DC has for you:

On this human base, Christian initiation is more profound: the awakening of the sense of God; the first steps in prayer; education of the moral conscience; formation in the Christian sense of human love, understood as a reflection of the love of God the Father, the Creator. (DC, 227)

Within those guidelines there's a lot of flexibility and respect for individual families, what works for you, and what you're going through. In other words, the Church respects that you are the parent. You can decide the best way to share the faith with your family. Here are those four guidelines again, stated a little more simply.

- Awaken the sense of God
- Take first steps in prayer
- Form consciences
- Understand Christian love as reflection of God's love

We'll talk about these in a little more detail next. So on those days when you wonder if your kids are getting anything out of faith formation (whether at home, school, or your parish), or if you ever wonder if you're doing this right, look to these guidelines.

One quick word of advice. Don't look at the individual ideas under each heading here as a sort of checklist you have to accomplish. Any how-to ideas here are merely suggestions for ways you *could* do this. Again, you know what's best for your family. As long as you have an understanding of the guidelines above, and you're doing your best to live them with your family, you're doing just fine.

Guideline 1:

Awaken the Sense of God

Everyone feels a sense of God, whether we're aware of it or not. Because God has created everything and is everywhere, we experience him at every moment of our lives, right down to a cellular level. Before they're born, babies experience a sense of God's love in the warmth and protection of the womb. As parents, we nurture that sense when we hold our babies, feed them, and snuggle up close with them. As they grow into toddlers, our kids expand their world and we get lots of new opportunities to boost those God experiences—taking your child on a fall hike and commenting on God's glorious creation, for instance.

But awakening a sense of God isn't a one-and-done experience. And it doesn't only happen when they're little. We need to be grateful for that, because, like everything else with kids, these experiences don't always turn out the way we expect them to.

I learned that the hard way one Christmas many years ago, when my husband and I took our nearly three-year-old son to a family event at our local historic center—a reenactment of a typical early California Christmas. Inexplicably, a trained monkey was part of

the festivities. As you might imagine, our preschooler was far less impressed by the candle-making demonstrations or even the historic Christmas tree than he was by the live monkey that interacted with him. Later that evening, feeling very educational, I snuggled up with my son and read him a lovely picture book about the first Christmas. I showed him Mary and Joseph and the stable. Then I pointed to my big belly and loftily explained that our family was expecting a baby soon, just like Mary. “But of course, our baby isn’t Jesus,” I said. “No, mom,” my son assured me excitedly, pointing to my belly. “That’s not Jesus. Because Jesus is a monkey.”

So my preschooler’s awakening sense of God was...a monkey? I suppose I should have been glad that he connected Jesus with the Christmas event that day, but still, one reason why we keep plugging away. No sense of God is ever complete, and sometimes it’s a little, um, skewed. But we get all kinds of chances—practically every day of our lives—to awaken this sense for us and for our children.

We might not always see direct results, and some awakenings are merely getting the soil ready for God to go to work. For instance, you could count signing up your child to be baptized as one of the prime ways you awaken the sense of God. The same goes for signing up your child for summer vacation Bible school or deciding on a religious education program, or even shopping for Christian books and videos to share.

But as every parent learns, once you awaken something, you don’t just leave it alone. So you talk to your kids about God. Maybe you’re uncomfortable with this. Maybe this didn’t happen in your own family, so it feels a little weird. That’s okay. Everyone finds their own way. As long as you’re paying attention and giving your kids lots of opportunities to experience God, you’re doing okay.

Still, nothing beats getting out into God’s creation. As St. Paul says, “Ever since the creation of the world, his invisible attributes of eternal power and divinity have been able to be understood and

perceived in what he has made” (Romans 1:20).

Whether it’s regularly spending time in the backyard or a park, taking a family camping trip, or just going for regular walks, you’re communicating how you value God’s creation. You don’t have to turn these experiences into long sermons or object lessons. A casual comment or short prayer of thanksgiving once in a while might be all you need. If you do want to get into conversations, use language kids can appreciate. In her book *How to Talk to Kids about God*, Allie Connors Johnston offers this wise advice for talking with young children:

When you talk with your child using the language of God as Creator, you will activate natural curiosity and creativity, sparking wonder about and appreciation for the world and God’s divine design. Use these descriptive words as you talk with your child about God as Creator: artist, designer, builder, maker.

Teens and pre-teens

If you aren’t in the habit of talking about God regularly and you suddenly spring this on your older kids, well, you can imagine the kind of response you might get. On the other hand, even if God is part of your regular family conversation, at some point, many kids will clam up. So, how do you talk about your faith to older kids?

Carefully. And you do a lot more listening than talking. Just listening to a teen’s thoughts and opinions about what’s happening in the world or at school (without judging or offering unasked for advice) can help you see how they’re experiencing (or not experiencing) God. If you really want to talk, though, it never hurts to share your own faith story once in a while. Did you ever question your faith? Did you meet someone who influenced you in your faith—negatively or positively? Respect your child enough to share age-appropriate stories of times you faltered and later found God.

Other practical ways to wake everyone up to God

To build awareness of God, we can look within too. I mean, within our homes. Take a look around your living space. How is God expressed? Do you keep fresh flowers around? The rocks you collected on a nature walk? Good for you. You're building an awareness of God through creation.

To share more traditional images of God in your home, you don't have to go out and buy an expensive hand-carved crucifix or work of art if that's not in your budget. So why not proudly display your kids' artistic expressions of God? Hanging in my office right now is a drawing one of my sons made of a nativity scene on a piece of lined paper. (By the way, there is no monkey anywhere to be found in that artwork.)

How is God expressed through your family's entertainment options? Do you watch any movies with Christian themes? How is God's name expressed in your home? Is his name always used with reverence? Just some questions to think about here.

And remember, we're talking about *families*. Not just kids. What about your sense of God? Does it need some sense of awakening? Have you been feeling cut off lately? Why not talk to God today about that? Remember that new experiences of God happen well into adulthood. For instance, a few years ago at my parish, one of the folks baptized into the faith was a widower in his eighties, who said he never really felt God's presence in his life until after his wife had died. At his baptism, he wept copious tears. He passed away only a few years later, but during that time, he kept everyone in the parish on their toes, asking hard questions about the faith, sharing his struggles with forgiveness, and getting involved in the parish food pantry. Truly, God finds new ways to talk to us all our lives. Which brings us to the next guideline...

Guideline 2: Take First Steps in Prayer

Fr. Murphy was shocked, *absolutely shocked*, that my fifth grade class didn't know certain prayers. So, on his next weekly visit, he slammed a stack of them on my teacher's desk. Each of us received three mimeographed pages—front and back—of prayers to memorize by the following week. Years later, my high school religion teacher, Sr. Diane, took me aside after I had turned in an assignment about the Psalms. I thought I was in trouble for something, but she presented me with a small paperback book from her own collection, *The Psalms for Modern Man*. With a warm smile, she encouraged me to pray them. I still treasure and read that book from Sr. Diane, and I've grown to love praying with the Psalms. I don't know what happened to those pages of prayers I got in fifth grade.

Of course, you can see the difference. But how often do we take Fr. Murphy's approach, teaching our kids the memorized prayers and thinking our work is done? Sr. Diane's approach took into account that first guideline from the DC: my awakening sense of God. She must have seen something in the assignment I wrote that inspired her to share that little book with me. Sr. Diane opened a door

for me, to a new way of praying and a new way of experiencing God.

Maybe your kids will be blessed to have a teacher like Sr. Diane. I think that teacher will be you. Because you'll recognize that first steps in prayer don't only happen when kids are little, but through our whole lives. You'll recognize that it's God who takes the initiative in calling us to prayer—in astounding, surprising, wondrous, and new ways—and it's simply our job to notice and respond.

Take our greatest prayer, the Mass. We've certainly celebrated the Mass differently over the past year. Yet God is still present with us there, despite the fact that we might not be there in person. How has your experience of the Mass changed over the past year? Think back to when you were a child. You certainly don't attend Mass today the way you did when you were 8. Your experiences have shaped your participation in the Mass, and will continue to do so throughout your life.

But maybe you're feeling like you don't get much out of Mass. Maybe it's more of an obligation for you than an experience of God's presence. No matter where we are in our experience of the Mass, there's always room to go deeper. In his book *A Fresh Look at the Mass*, Fr. David Knight writes:

Imagine you are Jesus at the Last Supper. You are about to die. What will keep your followers together when you are gone? What will keep your words alive among them? What will keep their hearts on fire? The Mass. The celebration of Eucharist. That is what Jesus relied on. The church calls Eucharist the “source and the summit of the Christian life.” At the Last Supper, Jesus took a loaf of bread, gave thanks, broke it, and gave it to his disciples, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” This is a sacramental remembrance: a remembrance that makes present what we remember.

In the Mass, Jesus is present and acting. That is where we encounter him—not alone, but in company with others: in a communal meal where we listen to his words together, respond to them together, and experience his presence among us and within us. All we have to do is pay attention at Mass, understand what we are paying attention to, and enter into it.

If you're feeling disconnected from the Mass, you're not alone right now. But God wants you back. If you need a bit of a jolt, why not try streaming the Mass from someplace new this week, for a different experience? You're not limited to your local churches. My neighbor who grew up in Poland recently discovered that she could stream Sunday Mass from a church in Warsaw. Another friend feels connected to her son away at school by streaming daily Mass from a church near the campus. Curious about the church where you grew up? Why not do an Internet search and see if the parish is still there and if it's streaming Sunday Mass? Share it with your kids and talk about what it was like there when you were a kid. Heck, you can even watch Pope Francis celebrate Mass at the Vatican.

Visit <http://www.catholictv.org/masses> to find streaming Masses from the Vatican; the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington, D.C.; Notre Dame University, and more.

No matter where you attend Mass online, keep supporting your own parish. Don't forget that your parish supports you in your faith and many other families too, plus countless programs to support the faith and welfare of people in your community.

How can you help your family “enter into” the Mass?

Remember, the Mass is our eucharistic celebration; and Sunday is the day of the resurrection. Make it a day of celebration, rest, and

thanksgiving for all of God's blessings. Keep the celebration of the Mass going long after that final blessing. If you can't afford to go out, or you don't have time to make a big Sunday dinner, make it something small and special. Ice cream on a Sunday evening, maybe, or Sunday morning doughnuts or pancakes.

Talk about the Mass with your kids. Note things Father said in his homily and ask your kids what they think about it. Ask questions: *Did you notice the color Father was wearing? Why do you think Jesus said that in the gospel?* Look ahead to the Sunday celebration and announce it to your kids beforehand: *Today is the feast of Christ the King. What do you suppose that means?*

Invest in a Sunday Mass missal. (There are many inexpensive options for both adults and kids—see the last page for links.) You can follow along with the readings, or look at them on your own time later on. Usually they offer a bit of commentary to think about.

Going back to Mass: Where are the flamingos?

Last fall, before the pandemic struck, I found myself alone at a Sunday Mass. A young family clambered into the pew directly behind me as our pastor shared a video called *The Veil Removed*, which depicts a way that angels are present at Mass. After the video, I heard a whisper from behind, repeating itself and growing louder and more insistent above the sounds of diaper bags opening and snack bags rustling: *"Where are the flamingos?"* It dawned on me—I think at the same time as her parents—that this adorable child had been paying close attention to the video, and looking around, she wanted to know where these feathered angel friends, or "flamingos," were, here at church. (You can kind of see her thought process, right?) When I turned around for the Sign of Peace, the mom was so apologetic about all the noise. My eyes filled with tears as I reached out to hug her. What I wanted to say, but couldn't because I was so full of emotion and awe at this beautiful family, was how grateful I

was for their presence, and for the gift of curiosity—and angels and flamingos too.

So, when your church opens and it's safe for you to go with your kids, please seek out people like me. Don't waste what precious little energy you have worrying about anyone who gives you the quick sidelong glance (you know the one I'm talking about) when your kids make a little noise, or who makes you feel like apologizing for being there. Just look for the welcoming, smiling faces. Every parish has people who welcome sitting (safely) near families with kids. Find us. Really. We love and support you.

I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who create dissensions and obstacles, in opposition to the teaching that you learned; avoid them. (Romans 16:17)

Other Ways to Pray with Your Family

You're probably already communicating more about prayer than you realize. In her book, *Prayers and Rituals for the Home*, Kathy Hendricks writes:

Prayer and ritual are a natural fit within families. Without even realizing it, parents communicate a great deal about spirituality through their own practice and in the way they celebrate both special and ordinary times.

Try exploring some kinds of prayer yourself and take your kids along. Let them teach you something new about it. Here are a few traditional Catholic prayer practices to introduce or build on.

Blessing prayers

These are among the easiest prayers for families to know and share. The most basic of all Catholic prayers is the Sign of the Cross, which you can say any time of day or night. Meal blessings, or “saying grace” is a way to remind your family that you put God first.

Blessing your child before school or at bedtime isn't just a blessing for them—it's a blessing for you too. Think about it. How much better will you sleep or go about your day, knowing you have asked God's blessings for your child?

Meditation

When Catholics talk meditation, they often talk about the Rosary. And when other people (and even some Catholics) talk about the Rosary, they often think of simply repeating prayers over and over. But the Rosary is much more. You meditate on events in the life of Christ, known as mysteries, to understand their meaning in your own life and discover what God might be saying to you through them. If you want to pray this with your family, be open to the different ways family members experience God. For instance, fingering rosary beads is a way to occupy our minds and bodies so we can focus more on Christ. But rosary beads might not work for your kids. Maybe for your child, meditating on the Joyful Mysteries means using those little hands to color pictures or build Lego models of each mystery, while the rest of the family says the prayers. To learn more about how to say the Rosary, visit <https://www.familyrosary.org/>

Contemplation

The best way to describe contemplation is lifting up your heart to God and simply being in his loving presence. You can do this anywhere—in your living room, on a quiet front porch, and of course, in the actual presence of the Blessed Sacrament at church.

The Daily Examen

This is the simple Ignatian practice of going through your day to see where and how God was present, and discern where he is leading you. For a unique way to do this with Scripture and music,

you can download the Pray As You Go app. Visit your app store or <https://pray-as-you-go.org/>

Praying with the Bible

The practice of *lectio divina*, or “sacred reading” calls us to meditate on God’s word in Scripture.

Celebrating the sacraments

Even if no one is celebrating a First Communion or confirmation in your family this year, you can still celebrate the sacraments. You can receive the beautiful sacrament of reconciliation when it’s available. You can pray for those being baptized and married in your parish. And if someone in your family is seriously ill or aged, don’t hesitate to call your parish and arrange for them to receive the blessing of the sick.

Celebrating feasts and seasons

When we celebrate holy days, we find ways to pray, but we also have fun. Here are just a few traditional Catholic ways to party and pray throughout the year:

- Light candles on an Advent wreath.
- Fill kids’ shoes with candy on the feast of St. Nicholas.
- Wake up early to dance, sing *las mañanitas*, drink hot chocolate, and enjoy traditional Mexican foods like tamales on the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe.
- Make a Three Kings cake for the feast of the Epiphany.
- Have a pancake race on Mardi Gras.
- Solemnly bury the alleluia during Lent.
www.catholicicing.com/bury-alleluia-activity-for-lent-through/
- Celebrate the Sicilian tradition of La Tavola di San Giuseppe, a table laden with Italian food and desserts to share on St. Joseph’s Day.

- Have a Mary Crowning in May.
- Collect summer herbs and flowers to celebrate the Feast of the Assumption.
- Dress up as saints on All Saints Day.

Praying with art and music

“Families can draw upon art as a way to engage in prayer that is reflective and meditative, as well as interactive and lively,” says Kathy Hendricks in *Prayers and Rituals for the Home*. There’s art to explore in your church, of course, but don’t rule out non-religious art for inspiration. The same holds true for music that inspires your family. How else do you encourage prayer in your home? Here’s a quick list of a few other traditional prayer types and practices:

- Acts of Faith, Hope, Love, and Contrition
- Examination of Conscience (looking at our own thoughts and actions for ways we are unloving toward God or others—so that we can ask God’s forgiveness and grace to do better)
- Five-finger Prayer <https://www.catechist.com/five-finger-glove-prayer-craft/>
- Intercessory prayer (asking God’s help for others, i.e., saying a quick Hail Mary when you hear a siren—for the responders as well as those they’re attending to)
- The Lord’s Prayer or Our Father
- Marian Prayers (the Angelus, Hail Mary, Memorare, etc.)
- Morning and evening prayers
- Novena prayers (said once a day for nine days)
- Petition Prayers (asking God directly for what you need)
- Prayers before traveling or starting a new project
- Prayers of Praise (recognizing who God is and giving him glory, for example the Gloria prayer at Mass)
- Prayers of gratitude and thanksgiving (Celebrating the

Eucharist is our greatest prayer of Thanksgiving for Jesus' sacrifice on the Cross.)

- Professions of faith, such as the Apostles Creed or Nicene Creed
- Room and home blessings
- Stations of the Cross

Don't forget—playing is praying

Fr. Stephen Gadberry, better known as the Ninja Priest, explains that playing can be praying. “When you’re playing, your mind is totally in the moment,” he says. “You’re not worried about what happened yesterday or what will happen tomorrow. You’re totally open to what God is saying to you.” So, if you’ve had the kind of day where everything got away from you, and you start beating yourself up for not praying, ask yourself, did I play with my kids? Did my kids play? If the answer is yes to either of those, then ease up on yourself. You helped your kids experience the “now” of God.

Guideline 3: Form Consciences

Oh, if only life were as simple as those first two guidelines—if all we had to do was pray together every night and seek God in nature walks. But real life isn't always so lovely and tidy. Real life is doing. It's making choices between good and bad, right and wrong. It's paying consequences for poor decisions. (Sometimes we can even feel like we pay consequences for making the right decisions.) Real life is feeling helpless as we watch all this happen to our kids, our only consolation knowing that they will learn something, someday, from their mistakes.

Building your child's moral conscience to navigate life's choices might seem daunting, but again, you're already doing this work whenever you reward good behavior and set consequences for poor behavior, when you talk with your kids about their choices. Most important, you're doing this by building up those first two guidelines—awakening the sense of God and taking those first steps in prayer. In his book *Teaching the Basics of Catholic Morality*, James Philipps writes:

We are all caught up in a relationship with a God who wants to be known by us as intimately as God knows us. Yet we are also in the loving hands of a God who will settle for nothing less than our best efforts, begun with and carried along by divine grace, to love one another. Again and again we are called to respond to the wonderful truth that we are loved more than we can possibly imagine. We make this response when we choose to love our neighbor with a love so thorough and far-reaching that it even includes our enemies. The essence of Christian living can be summed up in this way: whatever choices we make that lead us into deeper relationship with creation, other people, and God are morally good choices.

We don't have to separate teaching morals from seeking God. It's all one, loving beautiful action. When we model God's love, we teach the life God wants for us. (It just so happens that's a good, moral life.) When we help our kids develop a prayer life, we help them seek a relationship with God who will guide them all through their lives.

We've talked about God's revelation through his Creation. God also reveals himself through Scripture. God reveals himself in the rules for living the life that keep us close to him: the Ten Commandments. Jesus makes these even clearer in the Great Commandment and in the Beatitudes. God's laws are not just written in Scripture—he has written them in our hearts. So when we say we're following our hearts, we're following God.

We can lose touch with this truth when we let other things get in the way of our relationship with God, like shame about sin. But by building up our relationship with God, we can know more clearly what he wants for us. That's what building our conscience is. The Church identifies several tools we can use to build and form consciences:

- ***Prayer.*** Getting your kids comfortable with speaking to God when they're younger can help them be more comfortable turning to God when they need his guidance later in life.
- ***Scripture study.*** Jesus' whole life in the gospels is a lesson in how we should live. It can be tempting to dismiss formal lessons about the Ten Commandments, Jesus' Great Commandment, or the Beatitudes, thinking that we've already covered them once or twice. But we model these every day, and we learn new things about them every time we identify them in the way we live our daily lives.
- ***Learning the Church's teaching.*** If you're following a school or parish-based program, many of the teachings of the Church have been carefully incorporated into every lesson. This is a good opportunity to review them yourself. What does the Church really teach about the Eucharist? About social justice? About Mary, and praying with the saints? If you wonder or question, use this opportunity, while your kids are learning, to brush up, review, and gain new understandings for yourself.
- ***Getting advice from others we respect.*** Who will your child go to for advice? Who does your child respect? If you've been helping your child experience how much God loves us and how God is active in our lives all along, you'll help your child identify and respect the people who follow God's ways too.
- ***Developing habits of choosing and doing good.*** You help your child practice these all the time. Being intentional about them might mean talking together about what you learn from these experiences.

Most important, we get God's supernatural grace—which is beyond anything we can do on our own—in the sacraments. We get God's own strength to live the life he wants for us in the Eucharist. We ask his forgiveness—and get his grace to do better next time—in the sacrament of reconciliation. Imagine your child facing a moral decision and automatically having all these tools ready to access. No, they don't make every decision easy, but like any tool, the more we practice with them, the better we get.

Guideline 4: Understand Christian Love as Reflection of God's love

So far, we've talked about how we experience God's love in our own lives. But we don't keep it inside. The message of Jesus in the gospel is clear.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a mountain cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and then put it under a bushel basket; it is set on a lampstand, where it gives light to all in the house. Just so, your light must shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your heavenly Father. (Matthew 5:14–16)

The closer we get to Christ, the more we become aware that we are not alone. Our families are not little islands unto ourselves. We are part of the body of Christ, the Church. We are part of a community of people just like us. What's more, we are uniquely qualified to make the world a truly better place. As Pope Francis says, "building strong families is how we create a strong society. It is in the family that we learn to live with others despite our differences."

So how do we families create a strong society? Jesus gives guidelines when he speaks of the Judgment of the Nations:

“Then the king will say to those on his right, ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father. Inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, a stranger and you welcomed me, naked and you clothed me, ill and you cared for me, in prison and you visited me.’ Then the righteous will answer him and say, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? When did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? When did we see you ill or in prison, and visit you?’ And the king will say to them in reply, ‘Amen, I say to you, whatever you did for one of these least brothers of mine, you did for me.’ And these will go off to eternal punishment, but the righteous to eternal life.” (Matthew 25:34–46)

The Church puts these into a practical format known as the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy, which we are called to perform every day. (Yes, every day.)

Corporal Works of Mercy

Feed the hungry

Give drink to the thirsty

Shelter the homeless

Visit the sick

Visit prisoners

Bury the dead

Give alms to the poor

Spiritual Works of Mercy

Counseling the doubtful

Instructing the ignorant

Admonishing the sinner

Comforting the sorrowful

Forgiving injuries

Bearing wrongs patiently

Praying for the living and the dead

If you'd like to see how these can be done during the Covid-19 pandemic (and why these acts of mercy are needed more than ever right now), the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB) offers a fact sheet with practical ideas. You can see it here: <https://www.usccb.org/resources/corporal-and-spiritual-works-mercy-during-covid-19>

A Few Last Words

I've said it before. You are not alone when it comes to the Church. None of us is. This is one of the biggest messages of the DC:

The Christian community is a family of families and is itself the family of God. Community and family are, each for the other, a constant and reciprocal point of reference: while the community receives from the family an understanding of the faith that is immediate and connected in a natural way to the affairs of life, the family in turn receives from the community an explicit key for using faith to reinterpret its experience. Aware of this profound connection, the Church, in her devotion to evangelization, proclaims the Gospel to families, showing them by experience that this is “joy that ‘fills hearts and lives,’ because in Christ we have been ‘set free from sin, sorrow, inner emptiness and loneliness.’” (DC, 229)

In other words, we families learn from the Church, but we have a lot

to teach the Church too, especially about respecting and celebrating the many different ways we share our faith in Christ, who loves us beyond measure. With that in mind, I hope you have a circle of good and kind friends at church you can look to for support, advice, prayer, laughs and some babysitting now and again. If you don't, please reach out. And if you do have a few friends, please keep an eye open for those families who seem alone or lost. Because remember, we are "a family of families."

Finally, you have a lot of heavenly friends in your corner. I'll leave you with their words of wisdom and inspiration.

*Christ has no body but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world,
Yours are the feet with which he walks to do good,
Yours are the hands, with which he blesses all the world.
Yours are the hands, yours are the feet,
Yours are the eyes, you are his body.
Christ has no body now but yours,
No hands, no feet on earth but yours,
Yours are the eyes with which he looks
Compassion on this world.
Christ has no body now on earth but yours.*

ATTRIBUTED TO ST. TERESA OF AVILA

Be who you are and be that well. **ST. FRANCIS DE SALES**

Your ordinary contact with God takes place where your fellow men, your yearnings, your work and your affections are. There you have your daily encounter with Christ. It is in the midst of the most material things of

the earth that we must sanctify ourselves, serving God and all mankind.

ST. JOSEMARÍA ESCRIVÁ

For me to be a saint means to be myself. Therefore the problem of sanctity and salvation is in fact the problem of finding out who I am and of discovering my true self. **THOMAS MERTON**

Peace begins with a smile. **ST. TERESA OF CALCUTTA**

Prayer is nothing less than friendship with God. **ST. TERESA OF AVILA**

Teach us to give without counting the cost. **IGNATIUS OF LOYOLA**

I believe, though I do not comprehend, and I hold by faith what I cannot grasp with the mind. **ST. BERNARD OF CLAIRVAUX**

Holiness consists simply in doing God's will, and being just what God wants us to be. **ST. THÉRÈSE OF LISIEUX**

Further Reading...

BOOKS I'VE MENTIONED HERE

A Fresh Look at the Mass: A Helpful Guide to Better Understand and Celebrate the Mystery, Fr. David Knight
<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/frloatmaiheg.html>

How to Talk to Children About God, Allie Connors Johnston
<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/howtotatoyoc4.html>

Prayers and Rituals for the Home, Kathy Hendricks
<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/prandriforho.html>

Teaching the Basics of Catholic Morality, James Philipps
<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/tebaofcamoic.html>

OTHER GREAT RESOURCES FOR FAMILIES

Pflaum Gospel Weeklies is an easy-to-use faith formation resource in the form of an accessible and very interesting weekly magazine.
<https://www.pflaumweeklies.com/>

Living Faith Kids provides short, daily reflections and kid-friendly activities related to the Mass readings.
<http://www.livingfaithkids.com/>

Living With Christ Sunday Missal
<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/sundaymissal.html>

Sunday Missal for Young Catholics is a family friendly missal with color illustrations, key words, the full Sunday readings, and the Ordinary of the Mass.

<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/sumiforyoca.html>

QUICK READS FOR PARENTS

A New Examination of Conscience: Faith Questions for Reflection and Personal Growth, Lonne Murphy

<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/newexofconed.html>

Blessings for the Home, Daniel Connors

<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/blforhonegop.html>

The Busy Person's Guide to Creating a Catholic Home, Lorene Hanley Duquin

<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/bupegu.html>

One-Minute Retreats: Prayer and Practices for Busy Catholics, Constance Carlson

<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/onreneandprf.html>



Additional Related Resources in the *Refresh Your Faith* Series Include

The Scope and Tasks of Catechesis

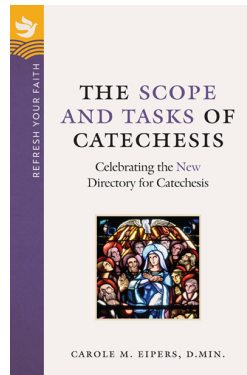
Celebrating the New Directory for Catechesis

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Dr. Carole Eipers focuses on the Directory's call for a new kind of catechesis—"an itinerary of faith"—as she guides us through the newly named Five Tasks of Catechesis: Leading to Knowledge of the Faith; Initiating into the Celebration of the Mystery; Forming for Life in Christ; Teaching Prayer; Introduction to Community Life.

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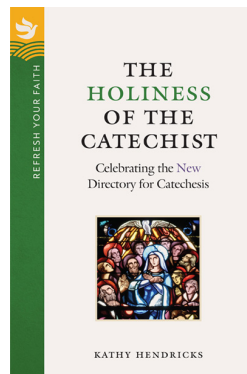
Celebrating the New Directory for Catechesis

KATHY HENDRICKS

In this booklet, Kathy Hendricks sheds light on the rich and varied ways that catechists witness the Good News through their own personal holiness. Framed by personal stories and inspiration from saints and spiritual writers, she guides catechists through the many insights the Directory offers about how to integrate everyday holiness into catechetical ministry.

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<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/hooftcanenewd.html>



The Gift of Being a Catechist

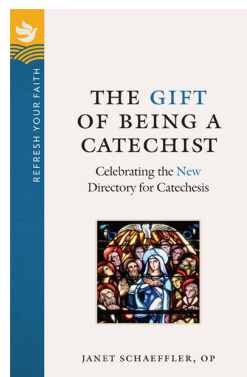
Celebrating the New Directory for Catechesis

JANET SCHAEFFLER, OP

In this inspiring booklet, Janet Schaeffler, OP, shows us how the Directory affirms and celebrates the vocation of catechists and catechetical leaders, and how each of us is called to this role in different ways. She helps catechists discover the many facets of their call—as builders of community, dynamic animators, creative artisans, and more.

32 PAGES | \$3.95 | 5½" X 8½" | 9781627855730

<http://www.twentythirdpublications.com/giofbecanene.html>





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